

How to Handle a Dog Attack

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Imagine that you're enjoying a run in the park or a bike ride through the neighborhood when, suddenly, an unfamiliar dog runs up to you, snarls, and primes himself to lunge. What should you do? There's a right way and a wrong way to handle a dog attack. Keep yourself safe by staying calm and taking some measures to diffuse the situation.

EditSteps

EditPart 1 of 4: Warding Off an Attack



1. 1

Do not panic. There's some truth to the old adage that dogs and other animals can "sense fear". If you become agitated and run or scream, you may make the dog feel more confident

in his attack, or, worse, you may appear threatening to the dog. Neither of these is a good situation to be in.



2. 2

Make yourself rigid and motionless like a tree. When a dog approaches, stand completely still with your hands at your sides, like a tree and avert your eyes.^[1] In many cases the dog will lose interest and walk away if you ignore him.

- Do not wave your arms around or kick with your legs; the dog may perceive these actions as threatening.
- Don't make eye contact, since that could also cause the dog to lunge.
- Stand sideways to the dog and keep him in your peripheral vision instead of facing him and making eye contact. This will signal to the dog that you are not a threat.
- Don't open your hands and arms up to a bite by extending them. Keep your fingers curled into fists to avoid getting them bitten. The dog may come quite close, even sniffing you, without actually biting.

3. 3

Do not try to run away. Running away can awaken the dog's prey instinct to chase and catch animals. He may pursue you vigorously even if his initial intent was just playful. Additionally, you won't be able to outrun most dogs if you're on foot. Even if you are on a bicycle, many dogs will be able to catch up to you.^[2]



4. 4

Distract the dog with another object. If the dog continues to threaten you, offer him something to chew on, such as your backpack or water bottle: anything but your arm or leg. This may distract him enough to give you time to escape.

- You may want to carry treats or toys when traveling in areas known to be home to dangerous dogs. If approached by an angry dog, throw your treats or toy away from you. The dog may go after these instead of you.

EditPart 2 of 4: Defending and Protecting Yourself



1. 1

Face the dog and command, "back away." If the dog continues to behave aggressively, and ignoring or pacifying him is no longer working, face him and sternly command him to leave.

- Use a strong, deep, and confident commanding voice.
- Continue to avoid making eye contact.
- The dog may become discouraged or intimidated and leave.



2. 2

Fight back against an attacking dog. If the dog starts biting you, you've got to defend yourself. Hit or kick the dog in the throat, nose, and the back of the head. This will stun the dog and give you time to get away.^[3]

- It's okay to raise your voice at this point. Yell for help as you're fighting back. Hopefully others will hear and come to your aid. However, avoid screaming as this may lead the dog to strengthen his attack.
- If you have a stick or another weapon, you can (and should) use it to hit the dog. Don't hit him over the head, though; most dogs have very thick skulls, so this will only serve to make the dog angrier.
- Fight as though your life depends on it, because it does. Dog attacks can be fatal. While you may not want to kill or hurt the dog, your life is far more important than the dog's.



3. 3

Use your weight to your advantage. Bring your entire body weight to bear on the animal, specifically pushing down with the hard points of your knees or elbows. Dogs are vicious biters but cannot wrestle, so try to get an advantageous position and break their bones fairly quickly. Get on top of the animal and concentrate force on areas such as the throat or ribs while minding to keep your face out of clawing/biting range.

- If you are looking for a more humane solution and can manage it, straddle the back of the dog with your partial body weight and apply forward pressure to the back of the neck to immobilize the dog until help comes.



4. 4

Protect your face, chest, and throat. If you fall to the ground during the attack, not only is it more difficult to fight off the angry dog, but vital areas on your torso, head, and neck become more vulnerable to attack. These are the most important spots on your body to protect because bites in these places will inflict the most damage and will have the greatest chance of killing you.

- Protect your vitals^[4] by rolling onto your stomach, tucking your knees in, and bringing your hands (balled in fists) up to your ears.
- Resist the urge to scream or roll away, as these actions may further encourage the dog.^[5]



5. 5

Leave the area slowly and carefully. Once the dog loses interest in you, leave the scene of the attack slowly by backing away without sudden movements.^[6] [Staying calm](#) and stationary can be a real test of your nerves in such a stressful situation, but it's the best thing to do as long as the dog isn't actually biting you.

[Edit](#)Part 3 of 4: Handling the Aftermath



1. 1

Attend to any wounds. If you are bitten, be sure to take care of any wounds promptly, as even minor bites can cause infection. Perform basic first aid procedures for bites suffered from a dog attack:

- Apply gentle pressure to stop minor bleeding. Use a clean cloth or sterile gauze pad. If bleeding is serious or if it won't stop after several minutes of applying pressure, seek professional medical attention.
- Wash the wound thoroughly. Use warm water and soap to gently [cleanse the wound](#).
- Dress the wound. Use a sterile [band-aid](#) (for very small cuts) or sterile bandages for larger lacerations.
- Look closely for signs of infection, including redness, warmth, increasing tenderness, or oozing pus. See a doctor if any of these symptoms arise.



2. 2

Call the authorities. It's important to determine whether an attacking dog has rabies or a history of aggression. Call the authorities immediately after a dog attack so that the dog can be prevented from harming anyone else and be tested for diseases.

- If the dog that attacked you was a stray, he may attack others, too. Removing him from the area is the best way to ensure the safety of yourself and others.
- For dogs with owners nearby, how you handle the situation after the attack has been diffused is up to you. If you've been hurt, you may want to take legal action. Many states have laws holding owners responsible for the actions of their dogs.



3. 3

See a medical professional promptly. If you were bitten by an unknown dog, a dog that was later found to have rabies, or a dog that appeared to be foaming at the mouth, it's *imperative* that you see a doctor right away to get preventative treatment for the deadly disease rabies.

- The rabies shot sequence, if it is necessary, should be started as soon as possible after the bite.
- Most European countries are considered to be “rabies-free,” so a shot is not *likely* to be necessary in the event of an attack that takes place in Europe.
- If you haven't had a tetanus shot in the past 5 years, you may require additional preventative tetanus treatments.
- In general, any significant wounds from a dog attack should be examined by a medical professional.

EditPart 4 of 4: Taking Precautions Against Attacks



1. 1

Look for warning signs. Most dogs are not aggressive, but, rather, just curious or defending what they perceive as their territory. Thus, to avoid unnecessary conflict, it is important to be able to tell if a dog is just playing or is being truly aggressive. While some breeds have been singled out as being particularly vicious, any mid-size and large dog breed can be dangerous,^[7] so do not ignore warning signs because you think a certain breed is harmless or friendly. Watch for common signs of aggression (and non-aggression):^[8]

- Growling, snarling, and baring teeth are obvious displays of aggression and should be treated as such.
- An angry dog may show the whites of his eyes, especially if these aren't normally visible.
- Pulled-back ears laying flat against the head are a telltale sign of aggression, whereas normal floppy or elevated ears usually signal a dog's nonchalance.
- If the dog approaches you with its body relaxed and with a sloping curve in its midsection, the dog is probably not going to attack.
- A dog whose body is tense, straight and stiff (head, shoulders and hips aligned) could mean business.
- A loping gait means the dog is playful and checking you out. An even, steady run means the dog may be dangerous.



2. 2

Avoid aggravating a dog. Most dog attacks are the result of insufficient containment of the dog, poor training, or taunting. Unfortunately, the world will never be rid of bad owners, so it is wise to be prepared. Common sense should tell you not to aggravate any kind of animal.

- Never irritate a dog who's eating or caring for her pups. Dogs are extra-protective during these times.
- Avoid smiling at the dog. You may think you are putting on a friendly face with a big toothy smile, but an aggressive dog sees you baring your teeth for a fight.
- Dogs that are chained or tethered to a stationary object for extended periods of time are more likely to be aggressive, so do not come within their reach.^[9]



3. 3

Assume all unknown dogs are threats. In general, the best policy when it comes to dog attacks is to do everything you can to avoid them in the first place. If you see a dog that may be dangerous, stay away.

- Report any dangerous-looking dogs or possible strays in your neighborhood to the authorities.
- Teach your children never to approach unfamiliar dogs until they are sure they are safe.
- By giving all unknown dogs a wide berth until you find evidence that they are safe, you can avoid the majority of dangerous dog encounters.



EditTips

- If you are with a young child, particularly if you have crossed the path of a large dog, you may deem it necessary to hold the child in your arms. As you pick the child up, move slowly. Don't look the dog in the eye, especially when crouching down. Tell the child to stay calm and quiet, and to look at you.
- Teach children the mnemonic "Never run from a dog, be a tree or a log" in case they ever encounter an aggressive dog.
- If cycling, dismount and keep the bicycle between you and the dog. This will create a barrier of protection. If a dog is attacking you (not just barking) use the bicycle as a weapon to strike the dog. Holding the bicycle by the stem (handlebars) and the seat, swing the bicycle tire to hit the dog. Don't lose your grip, as, if so, you will have lost a valuable defensive tool.

- Try using pepper spray. Try hitting the face but in case you miss, it might be enough even if spread close to the face or on the body, because a dog's nose is very sensitive. In this case repeat over and over, if necessary until the dog stops.
- Dogs sense your fear, but also your determination for defense, except if the dog is really aggressive (rabid, a history of abuse or frustration, etc).

EditWarnings

- The owners of aggressive dogs can be worse than the dogs. If you have to injure or kill an attacking dog, get away from the area and call the police as soon as possible.
- Be careful when you use pepper spray or mace. The odds of hitting dog in the face before it can attack you are small, and if you're downwind, the over-spray will affect you. Even if you hit the dog in the face, you are likely just to make the dog angry, especially if it's feral.
- If the dog appears sick or if he falls ill within 10 days of the incident, the dog should be tested for rabies immediately. If the dog tests positive you must go through a series of rabies shots.
- Every dog is different, and dogs will sometimes react in unpredictable ways. These tips will help you escape danger in most situations, but you may have to adapt to an attack on-the-fly, so be alert.
- Remember that some breeds "wag late" (for instance, some super-friendly Akitas only start wagging 6 ft (2m) away), so don't assume an approaching dog is going to attack you because it's not wagging its tail.